have brought untold distress to the dense population of the adjacent area.

The northern plain has been, however, the friend of civilization, because, except for a few stretches marred by alkali or sand, it is very fertile. Together with a smaller plain in the valley of the Wei, a tributary of the Huang Ho, it was the scene of the development of the culture which shaped the rest of China. On it rose most of China's ancient capitals, and on it to-day stand several of her largest cities—notably Peking (lately also Peiping), Tientsin (near the mouth of the Pai Ho), and Tsinanfu, the capital of Shantung.

The sediment that furnishes the material for the plain is derived largely from a peculiar type of soil, the loess, which blankets many of the regions of North China. Loess occurs from the! borders of Mongolia on the north and the Tarim basin in Sinkiang on the west into Shantung on the east and in spots into the Yangtze Valley on the south. Often scores of feet in depth, in some place£ it forms plateaus and in others fills valleys. It is very friable anc while of varying texture, is usually reducible by rubbing to a : powder. Extremely fertile and easily cultivated, it is the sourrf of much of the agricultural wealth of North China. It has| vertical cleavage and often is worn down into gullies and canyc with steep walls. It is also easily eroded and accordingly cholj the rivers that drain it. The loess is probably of wind-borne ori| and apparently the product of thousands of years of dust stor not greatly dissimilar to those now familiar to the inhabitants! North China. It is of varying ages, the rate of deposition sedi ingly having been much more rapid in some eras than in oth^* In some places it can still be seen in process of

formation. W1
originally laid down by the wind, streams have carved into it -
have redeposited a large proportion of it, so that much of it
now in alluvial strata.

The fertility of the northern plain has been partly offset
deficient and irregular rainfall, especially inland. From the dawu
of history, droughts and floods have repeatedly scourged with
famine larger or smaller sections of the plain and the adjoining
highlands.

f Parts of the eastern boundary of the North China plain is
formed by the mountains of Shantung These consist chiefly of